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AX NOBISCUM

A POLITICAL SATIRE



Ralph

WARREN HILLS

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PAX NOBISCUM

The chronicle that I have here begun
Through many months of politics will run;
November's armistice—that day of fate—
Begins it, and we'll bring it down to date.

Some weighty interchanges first 'tis said
'Tween august spokesmen circled overhead
By wireless while a hundred armies stood
In desperate grapple in a sea of blood.

'Tis said that on October fourth Prince Max
Suggested a Wilsoniana Pax;
The Pax Wilsonian was declared to be
One suiting allied statesman to a "T";
Each ally interposed a slight
Condition, which we'll all agree was right;
England reserved the freedom of the sea;
France made it plain that there must be
Repayment made to wronged civilians for
The injuries done them in four years of war;
The U. S. loudly said the Boche must bust
The German Kaiser whom we could not trust;
With these additions to the Points Fourteen,
The bases of a proper peace were seen,
And by these contracts solemnly imposed
Hostilities were definitely closed.

One stipulation in the agreement says
That ere the lapse of thirty counted days
From that on which the armistice was penned
(Bringing all fighting to a definite end)
The Germans must disarm themselves and yield
All weapons used by armies in the field
So that conspiring at a later hour
Hostile demands would be beyond their power.

And free to rob us of our loot by talk
 In Paris conference doth make me balk."
 (Such scruples might stop men with brains of mush,
 But not Napoleonic minds like Foch.)

So back to Paris at a rapid rate
 He went—December Thirteenth was the date—
 Clemenceau and the British saw the point
 And Colonel House made the agreement joint
 That when the Germans came back to renew
 Next say at Spa the deal, they'd find a few
 Additions to the doughty Marshal's power
 That would o'erwhelm them like an icy shower
 (Just here some lawyers say the Great Ones broke
 The principles of Littleton and Coke.)

But when the Marshal crossed again the Somme
 He'd power indeed to take a fine-tooth comb
 And search Allemagne for useful things to take
 From Koenigsburg or Kiel to Constance Lake.

Arrived at Spa the Marshal proud, but thin,
 Commands his guards to show the Germans in;
 The Germans thought they'd have to do no more
 Than sign the same agreement signed before:
 Imagine then how deep their hearts were rent
 When Foch disclosed the newer document.

Said one to Foch: "Pray state, if we refused
 To sign this bond what measures would be used?"
 "If you refused to sign by any chance
 A million rifles ready to advance
 Would cross the Rhine," the Marshal said with force.
 The Germans beat their breasts but signed, of course.

They asked him when the occasion might be set
 When delegates in conference could be met.
 (The Boche's reiterations would not cease
 That they'd been promised a negotiated peace.)
 The Marshal answered with a grim "Ha! Ha!"
 The delegates you'll deal with are at Spa.

You say at home, your babies cry for food,
 And seem to think by this to change my mood.
 I swear by land you shall receive no aid,
 By sea the British stop you by blockade,
 And this shall last until we've got our loot
 And you are paupers made and starved to boot.
 Think not that those who sit in Paris City
 Have power to ameliorate your lot by pity;
 They'll make the Paris signing come so late
 That I'll have time to lay your land prostrate.
 I say the peace you'll make you'll make with me!
 The Pact Versailles a record mere will be."

Enough of armistices and blockades!
 Their grim but just significance invades
 Our calm and philosophic atmosphere.
 Let's turn to happier things and greater cheer.

The justly famous ship George Washington
 Docked safe—they say she had a pleasant run—
 Just one day after that great rendezvous
 Where Foch had learned at Paris what to do.
 Italia's King by chance came to Paris,
 So many Heads of State were there to see
 That France's capital went nearly mad
 According to them all its welcome glad.
 (It should be noted by the business done
 The day before, the armistice would run
 To January the Sixteenth, which meant,
 That nothing very vexing need be sent
 To Paris where those fine amenities
 Due to official guests from overseas
 Could take their course appropriate, without haste,
 And be accomplished in the best French taste.)
 The magic power of sympathetic mood
 Banished all chance of things that might intrude
 Dissentient motive or discordant word;
 The Conference started in entire accord.
 Then Europe heard, and hearing, half believed—
 Nay! credited, a doctrine high-conceived,

That old and outworn cults had passed away
 In the refulgent light of a new day
 When Justice, Faith, and their sweet sister Ruth,
 Could follow in the kindly train of Truth.

Full many a grave and earnest advocate
 In Europe's cloistered walls or halls of state
 In ages past has striven that mankind
 The formula of better ways might find.
 Great Gregory and wistful St. Bernard,
 And later Henry, in a time more hard,
 Sought then men's common evils to assuage,
 And in another and more formal age
 Rousseau devised a system natural
 Embodied in his Contract Social.

But now in Paris and elsewhere behold
 A social system new and vast unfold,
 In which all men in high and lowly stations
 Shall live in peace within a League of Nations;
 The war had killed all systems arbitrary,
 (Joining the League of course was voluntary)
 All that the system waited for you see
 Was that in purpose all men should agree.

They say you cannot to the rainbow add
 Another hue to those hues that it had,
 Or gild the substance of refined gold
 Or paint the beauty of the lily cold;
 Each jewelled ethic system ever made
 Was now however caused to look like jade.

Then listen to these promises of good
 Based on universal brotherhood;
 "The light that shone upon the mountain-top
 Will soon be shining here on field and shop;
 Unless in faith and courage we're unfit
 We cannot fail to-day of reaching it."

The new evangel rang through Britain old
 From ship-lined Clyde to Cornwall's rocky hold,
 "The plain man now is coming to his own,
 For errors past all statesmen must atone;

If any fails to heed the word now spoken
 Let him take warning that he will be broken."

In France the message ran from Brittanie
 To where the olive burgeons in Midi
 That in its journey onward now mankind
 Less painful and less bloody roads would find;
 And through Italia's warm and classic land,
 Where ancient glories shine on every hand
 From Veneto to Etna's barren side
 They heard with rapture that there was a tide
 Now running in the throbbing heart of man
 That never ran before since time began,
 That had o'erwhelmed the forces dark of might
 Replacing them by what was just and right.

The music even of the spheres must cease;
 One cannot always talk of endless peace;
 So touching earth again without a jerk
 The Conference at last got down to work.

Now when one seeks to tell veraciously
 The tale of that great congress at Parie
 The field's so vast, the game is so complex,
 He finds it difficult to clear the decks
 Of shiboleths and ancient maxims hoary
 With which the scribes have overlaid the story.

But still, while in this labyrinth we tread
 We'll walk straight if we do not lose this thread:
 The U. S. delegation was imbued
 With principles John Marshall had construed,
 And held, supported by the common laws,
 The civil code, and equity's wise saws,
 That by those teachings that his lips had dropped
 The Allies and the U. S. were estopped
 From saying that a claim for reparation
 Gave them the right to paralyze a nation.
 (U. S. and Europe some agreement found,
 But here they did not stand on common ground.)

As when a friend is charged to break the news
 Of great misfortunes he will often choose
 To speak at first of many other things
 Than of the painful message that he brings;
 So here this fateful issue was approached
 With care; they felt that it should not be broached
 At inauspicious time or in a way
 To jeopardize the dawn of the new day.

Hence, in the early days of the new year
 On the agenda other things appear;
 The mind official often had to leap
 From Iceland's cliffs to ancient Pontus deep:
 Perennial Poland daily held the stage
 And Muscovy where Bolsheviki rage
 (It's more than thirteen lunar months ago
 Since they refused our bid to Prinkipo.)
 The Czechslovaks wanted to condemn
 At once all lands that ought to come to them;
 Between Rumanian, Czech and Jugoslav,
 Hungarian hopes might founder in the Drave.
 New states of Esths and Letts and even Finns
 Pleaded for help unsteady on their pins,
 The Adriatic's waves were rolling high,
 In stormy seas the ship of state lay by
 (The helmsman left her drifting in the trough
 While telling Italy where she gets off.)
 Far flung, the Marshalls and the Carolines,
 Now freed from Prussia's deep and fell designs,
 Like every little people in creation
 Waited their turn for self-determination.

Crises arose thus and were somehow met,
 The circumstances giving some regret,
 Because the question vexed of reparations
 Retarded action on the League of Nations,
 And 'til the League was really made to live
 All territorial deals were tentative.

But now the Marshal found it necessary
 (About the second week in January)
 To be once more a space in Paris mewed
 Because the armistice must be renewed.

The Marshal came—I know not how 'twas finished,
 That Titan's powers were not one whit diminished,
 But broadened so that he could come to grips
 At Spa and seize all German ships!
 (The story is a marvel of this rum age;
 He took two million of their merchant tonnage.)
 The Paris meeting was most animated
 And in the current public press 'twas stated
 The conversation in its last two hours
 Was held in French—that language of the flowers,
 And that the Great Ones there of Saxon blood
 Of Gallic knew no more than any dud!

And when he'd done away the Marshal went,
 He'd been a most disturbing element.
 But now the counsels of the Heads of State
 Attained a more accelerated rate;
 Events moved fast, 'twas time to stop all funning,
 For in the hour-glass the sands were running.
 The longer in debate the Big Four stayed
 The more their patience was becoming frayed;
 As February's dreary days came on
 The Washington was chafing to be gone.

The Old World knew the treaty must be moulded
 To suit the scheme we've heretofore unfolded,
 Which was already more than half completed
 By those at Spa where Marshal Foch was seated,
 And nothing counter to its theme must run
 At Paris, or Foch's work would be undone.
 They therefore rang the changes on the mess
 Brought on us all by German ruthlessness;
 They did not let a day or hour pass
 Without the presentation of a mass
 Of evidence of crime enough to stun
 One's brain and all committed by the Hun.

They proved in full by solemn attestation
 The savage Teutons were an outlaw nation;
 They showed the theory to be absurd
 That Germans ever sought to keep their word;
 "Ergo," they said, "We plainly are released
 From promise made before the fighting ceased."
 No one not having a pro-German taint
 In that environment would want to paint
 A German character, if he were wise,
 That with this picture did not harmonize.
 If one had said that there was room for pity
 They would have run him out of Paris City;
 For "reparation" as the right solution
 They therefore substituted "retribution."
 And damages distinctly punitive,
 Were made the price that Germany should give.
 (Imagine now what eager France will do
 To Germany before she gets half through.)

On this point harmony at last prevailed—
 Only one day before the good ship sailed.
 Think not agreement in this case was easy,
 Or settled in a way off-hand and breezy
 (Like that concerning the Dalmatian Highlands,
 Shantung or the Pacific Islands)
 Of demonstrations clear it took a sight
 To prove the fact that it was just and right.
 Two mighty moral forces cannot meet
 Without indeed developing some heat
 (In fact they found a proposition tough
 In getting our consent to treat 'em rough.)
 But now all opposition ran to cover;
 The Old World knew that it could put it over.
 Again we see the armistice run out,
 And, mind you, this time they don't bother about
 Renewing it for only thirty days!
 The text "indefinite duration" says.

One other function to be given space
 On February's Fourteenth Day took place;

The Conference met in session plenary
 (The third one only called by high decree);
 Officials summoned to the Hall of Clocks
 Around the horse-shoe table met in flocks;
 And there 'mid deep attention it is said
 The newly-drafted Covenant was read.
 The English and Italians seemed quite cheery,
 The French 'tis said were plainly somewhat leary;
 The little nations all sat on the lid
 (It made no difference really what they did.)

Now if in reading closely what's been said
 You've never dropped the labyrinthine thread;
 Although its complicated you may see
 That February the Fourteenth should be
 Declared, with consequences bright or dark,
 The Conference's real high-water mark.
 'Til then the Germans' fate was in suspense;
 One really cannot credit the pretense
 When one considers all demands of state,
 That we were quite indifferent to their fate;
 'Til then in fact, they had a sporting chance,
 'Twas gone when the George Washington left France!
 'Twas written on the scroll that they were doomed,
 The British and old Foch had them entombed.

While many questions afterwards arose
 Within the conference before its close;
 And while some phases touched the operatic,
 The theme in general lacked of the dramatic;
 It lacked, no doubt, those moments tense of crisis
 That mark all history from the days of Isis
 When after war a suppliant nation knows
 That it awaits the judgment of its foes.
 The crisis, here delayed, had come at last;
 Their judgment on the luckless Boche was passed.

Therefore to make my chronicle consistent,
 (Although we might regard the time as misspent,)
 We'll go on and pass briefly in review
 The plain and obvious happenings that ensue

When back in March the ocean greyhound came
(The remnants of the diplomatic game.)

The sharing of the loot was in full swing
And estimates of what it ought to bring
Into depleted treasuries would amaze
The looker-on and leave him in a daze.
They placed the figure high up in the billions,
It mattered not had it been only millions,
The principle was questioned not at all
That by the treaty they would take it all.

One English Lord declared that they'd not stop
Til from the orange they'd squeezed every drop
And when the softened pulp had ceased to drip
They'd squeeze the essence out of every pip.

This Spartan attitude was very trying
For those who were not really for denying
Some moderation toward a fallen foe
And really had some pity for his woe;
But in this case they thought it best to drop
Discussion of a thing they could not stop.

So once again they turned to things like Yap
And making frequent changes on the map:
They ponderd long o'er Greece and Temesvaar;
They dotted in new boundaries near and far,
Their experts measured every mile and foot
But somehow those new lines would not stay put;
For every time they made an alteration
Minorities perverse upset the nation
(New states would rise much better than the old
If only folks would do as they are told.)
Just when they thought they'd calmed the Adriatic
Their dream was punctured by a poet extatic,
And when they portioned out remote Shantung
How many million Chinese hearts were wrung!

There's no use going into further details,
To tell it all the very pen fails.

Howe'er the fact remains that on a day
Quite early in the flowery month of May,
By working, they, while Springtime steals on,
Engrossed the treaty with its seals on.

The wisdom of their common view impelled,
Before the final signing-tryst was held,
That they should let the waiting Germans get
A peep before the fatal date was set;
And that they'd know the contract's contents meaty,
They sent the Huns a copy of the treaty.

Of course the German statesmen kicked once more
As hard as they had ever kicked before;
But still their earnest kicking did no good;
The document was sealed and writ in blood.

So, sadly to the Hall of Mirrors came
The last remaining day of that great game,
A delegation plainly socialistic,
Very forlorn and very pessimistic.
The Big Four, highly righteous and austere,
Sitting like Fates or other Forms of Fear,
On gold and damask chairs confronted them;
As a rare scene historic 'twas a gem.
Thus when the pregnant signatures were penned
The Versailles conference reached a silent end.

The deed is done, the doors are opened wide;
Exeunt in pairs the Great Ones, side by side,
To gaily trip adown the gravelled way
Of Versailles Park to watch the fountains play,
While round them surge the unrestrained throng,
Hailing the day when right supplanted wrong.

That night the business o'er old Clemenceau
In the deep silence of his own chateau
The gray swedes laid aside and said
Soliloquizing as he went to bed,
"Plus ça change"—his mood seemed one of jest,
"Plus ça change, la plus la même chose reste."



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